SETTING PRIORITIES FOR DETERRENCE INTEGRATION

Workshop Summary

Center for Global Security Research
LAWRENCE LIVERMORE NATIONAL LABORATORY

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Livermore, California, August 30-31, 2021

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On August 30 and 31, 2021, the Center for Global Security Research (CGSR) and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) hosted a workshop to examine priorities for deterrence integration in US national security objectives. The discussion brought together expert governmental and non-governmental participants from the United States, NATO, and allied countries to consider the lessons of past US government experiences and to set priorities for contemporary integration efforts. The workshop was structured to consider integration in four areas: across domains, across the phases of conflict, across the instruments of national power, and across allies and partners.

Discussion was guided by the following key questions:

- What can be learned from prior USG experience in trying to integrate in support of deterrence objectives?
- What priorities should be set now?

Key Takeaways and Implications

1. Put in historical perspective, deterrence integration is not a new aspiration, but it remains a work in progress. Since the end of the Cold War, each administration has sought some form of integration as part of adapting deterrence to a changing security environment. Important progress has been made in integrating along all four dimensions set out by the Office of Secretary of Defense (OSD) leadership (as further below), and the need for adaptations will continue well beyond the release of the next defense strategy. But there is an important opportunity today to establish direction and create conditions for future success.

2. The administration should set expectations accordingly. It should build on past successes and lessons and focus on developing a strong foundation in its thinking, concepts, and

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approaches – to include investments in institutions, people, and analytical tools, so that the next answer in four years is even better. It should refrain from trying to generate and apply a major new theory of deterrence, but rather focus on gaining a better understanding of domain capabilities and how they might be orchestrated to achieve deterrence goals. It should be mindful that the deterrence integration theme adds a great deal of complexity to the policy agenda and without proper definition may become all things to all people—and thus lose its meaning.

3. Further, there is a risk of over-emphasizing deterrence integration in the defense strategy review, which necessarily must outline a comprehensive vision for defense planning. Integrated deterrence is one concept for addressing operational and strategic challenges but must converge with and reinforce other concepts in support of the full range of defense strategy objectives. Integrated deterrence is particularly important in confronting a core challenge for the United States and its allies: to deter and defeat a nuclear-armed near-peer in a regional conflict over limited objectives without generating catastrophic nuclear escalation. This problem will only become more difficult as near-peer nuclear capabilities expand and the possibility of trans-regional conflict grows.

4. To get the essentials right, the administration should settle on a few key priorities in each of the four dimensions: integration across the domains of modern warfare, across the spectrum of conflict (peacetime, crisis, and war), across the instruments of national power ("DIME"), and with allies and partners, as discussed further below.

5. Deterrence integration must generate concrete courses of action. It must be tailored to particular actors in particular circumstances. This requires a robust understand of Red's concepts, capabilities, and theory of victory in modern war, something which increasingly informs U.S. planning. But Blue (and Green) must have its own theory of victory and supporting concepts and capabilities, as well as a capacity to fit Red, Blue, and Green into a net assessment framework. These are badly underdeveloped.

6. Courses of action for integrated deterrence must be expressed in operational plans that are likely to span regional combatant command areas of responsibility and require the capabilities managed by different functional combatant commands. Progress has been made in recent years in planning for globally integrated operations in the expectation that major conflicts will be transregional in nature. Integrated deterrence as a focus for defense strategy provides an opportunity to extend this progress beyond coordinated planning to something more truly joint in nature – based on the understanding that the ability to execute integrated deterrence operations in crisis or conflict will require the orchestration of cross-domain effects that may be delivered by a diverse set of capabilities not resident in a single command. Given the strategic nature of any great power crisis or conflict, the development, review or execution of integrated deterrence operations also requires the active involvement of civilian leaders and allied partners.

7. The value of integration for reducing nuclear risk is potentially substantial. Integration can help to provide more non-nuclear options and thereby convey an improving US ability to manage escalation risk below the nuclear threshold. It can also help to weaken the perception of a large first-mover advantage in cyber space and outer space and to reduce the risk of escalation arising from misjudgments about US strategic resolve.

8. The value of integration for further reducing the role of nuclear weapons in US deterrence strategy is not substantial—if it exists at all. In the 1990s and 2000s, the geopolitical environment favored a reduction in nuclear roles by the US and (arguably) others. The military environment required a focus on rogue states and counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations. And the technology environment offered near-term complementary capabilities (missile defense and conventional prompt global strike). The geopolitical, military, and technical context is entirely different in 2021.

Panel 1: Integration Across Domains

- What is the current state of multi-domain integration?
- What are the particular challenges of integrating cyber space, outer space, and the information domain?
- What can be learned from the "cross domain" excursion?
- What needs to be done now?

Since the release of the 2018 National Defense Strategy, the Department of Defense continues to make steady but incremental progress toward multi-domain integration. Department leaders recognize the need to integrate across domains, and they have made progress toward understanding key aspects of the problem. At the level of operational integration, current efforts are focused on developing integrated plans that involve multiple Combatant Commands simultaneously. Defense Department planners and strategists are also examining ways to develop deterrent and warfighting options that combine kinetic and non-kinetic capabilities from multiple domains.

These efforts have encountered challenges, however. At the operational level, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has been designated the global integrator for efforts to develop integrated plans across command boundaries, but the Chairman's role remains advisory, and it remains infeasible for the Chairman to arbitrate every multi-domain integration issue that arises. Some of these issues are better addressed at lower levels of seniority, yet the management apparatus to support delegated decision making on integration remains underdeveloped. Classification issues have also frustrated efforts to integrate across the space, cyber, and information domains by denying planners a clear picture of the full range of available capabilities.

Challenges have also arisen at the strategic level of analysis. First, uncertainties regarding the effectiveness and duration of some multi-domain capabilities creates a level of risk that military planners would prefer to avoid. Military planners are more comfortable with planning conventional military operations, which tend to have more predictable operational-level effects. Second, the availability of countermeasures to certain cyber and space actions complicates efforts to incorporate these capabilities into strategic signaling, because revelation of a capability could allow an adversary to apply a countermeasure. Third, the escalation implications of cyber and space actions remain unclear because of the lack of wartime experience with these domains and because of the lack of common Red/Blue understandings of the meaning of actions in the cyber and space domains. Attribution challenges with these domains can exacerbate risks of catalytic escalation because third parties could attempt to influence dynamic of a conflict to serve their own interests. Finally, participants identified a tendency within the broader Joint Force to overestimate the contribution newer capabilities, such as cyber. New capabilities will be important, but none will be a "silver bullet."

There are several areas for further work and sustained effort. Within the ambit of conventional-nuclear integration, there is a need for avoiding a reductionist view of nuclear deterrence that

focuses too narrowly on holding particular targets at risk. Integration efforts should be geared toward influencing the adversary's escalation calculus across the phases of conflict. This requires moving beyond the approach undertaken by the cross-domain deterrence experiment, which identified the promise of cross-domain effects but failed to produce an understanding of how cross-domain effects could translate into strategic influence. More broadly, multi-domain integration efforts should focus on how to counter Red's theory of victory. Operations to counter anti-access and area denial capabilities should also aim to preserve Blue/Green cohesion, deter Red nuclear escalation, and communicate Blue's resolve and capability.

Panel 2: Integration Across the Phases of Conflict

- What can be learned from the efforts of prior administrations to develop coherent strategies for peacetime, crisis, and war?
- What are the particular challenges of integrating strategies for competition and deterrence?
- How much integration is actually needed across the phases? Is "coherence" enough?
- What needs to be done now?

Past experience with integration for deterrence and competition suggests three lessons for the 21st century problem set. First, the United States needs to develop deep knowledge about its competitors' capabilities as well as their interests, motives and, ways of thinking. Lack of knowledge of the Soviet Union's nuclear capabilities hindered deterrence planning early in the Cold War, necessitating a major effort to locate Soviet bomber bases. Competitive strategy was similarly hindered by uncertainty about the ultimate outcome of the competition, including the probable duration of the US-Soviet standoff and the trajectory of US-Soviet relations. By the end of the Cold War, the West had developed a much richer understanding of the Soviet Union. Consciousness of the Red perspective permeated most US efforts. For instance, part of the development of cutting-edge strategic capabilities involved an effort to understand Red's own "black" programs to allow designers to better anticipate future threats to Blue's next generation capabilities. Today, there is growing understanding of Chinese thinking and military affairs, but significant gaps remain. And despite the long history of US-Russian relations, understanding of Russia remains confined to a small community experiencing little growth.

Second, the United States needs to better understand its own deterrence and competitive objectives. George Kennan's seminal X manuscript outlined two potential outcomes for the US-Soviet competition—coexistence with a moderated Soviet government or Soviet collapse—yet the US remained ambivalent between these two outcomes. Moreover, early in the Cold War the United States engaged in little strategic thought and did not grapple with strategic tradeoffs. Only when the Soviet Union began gaining competitive advantage did the United States engage to clarify its objectives and engage in strategic thinking to facilitate hard choices. Today, US military superiority has already eroded significantly, yet US strategic thinking remains behind the trend.

Finally, past eras of competition highlight the United States' capacity for considerable risk acceptance. Even though US tolerance for risk decreased as the Cold War unfolded, the US still accepted more risk that it has tolerated in recent years both in terms of how it approaches the competition and in terms of the kinds of operations it contemplated undertaking across the phases of conflict.

One challenge to integration across the phases of conflict concerned multi-domain capabilities that are difficult to reveal in peacetime for fear of compromising their efficacy. Another challenge is the need to hedge against strategic surprise. Hedging strategy can be implement

with enough capacity focused on anticipating alternative Red actions. But there is skepticism that the US has a sufficiently competitive mindset today to support this kind of hedging.

In striking the balance between full integration and coherence, an immediate step is achieving a basic level of coherence in global force posture. The Defense Department needs to develop an approach to global centralized operational control. One potential vehicle would be a global configuration of forces that are deconflicted across commands to provide a centralized picture of Blue responses to multiple Red challengers. Integration across the phases of conflict could be better served with a more proactive strategy for peacetime competition that includes an informational component. Finally, the US needed to better think about how to identify and prepare for the transitions between phases of conflict.

Panel 3: Integration of the Instruments of Power

- What lessons can be learned from past efforts to orchestrate Whole of Government approaches to the peacetime confrontation strategies of Russia and China? What more can and should be done to counter their "information confrontation" strategies? (DIME)
- What are the particular challenges of mobilizing soft power assets to support US objectives in crisis and war? Can they contribute meaningfully?
- What needs to be done now?

The United States has long struggled to integrate the tools of government in support of its deterrence and competitive strategies. The most successful examples of integration are those that communicated a clear objective and purpose to every player within the US government. During the Cold War, every organ of the US government could articulate how its mission contributed to containment of the Soviet Union, for example. Past failures, in contrast, failed to strike the right balance between military and non-military means. The counterinsurgency experience in Iraq and Afghanistan was one such example of excessive emphasis on military means.

The present challenge is made more difficult by several external and internal factors. Externally, the presence of two major competitors complicates US efforts to develop a coherent overall approach. Internally, the structure of the US government and trends in US society complicate efforts to field an integrated response to the challenges posed by Russia and China. Within the US government, many non-national security related agencies do not see themselves as contributing to deterrence and competitive strategy. Executive authority to compel more whole of government collaboration is also inhibited by the separation of powers. In the US, responses to Red's societal confrontation are necessarily going to come not just from non-military means, but from civil society. Yet there is no consensus within the cultural or scientific spheres as to the challenge posed by major power rivals or the proper response. More broadly, many elements in American society have rejected the expertise of elites, which has limited the ability of US government agencies to encourage societal resilience and a response to Red provocations.

Several measures could help the US better integrate its response to major power rivals, although there are limits. Primary and secondary school education could better encourage critical thinking and resilience to misinformation. Bipartisan acceptance on the broad contours of the challenge would also contribute to a whole of nation US response.

Finally, US strategy could itself contribute to whole of government integration in two respects. First, the US should better think through the consequences of the success and failure of its strategy. A successful strategy would mean Red's loss in the ideological and political aspects of the competition, which could drive Red toward more dramatic approaches to world order absent clear offramps. On the other hand, failure would mean the end of US influence over world order and in the ideological sphere, which would require the US to rethink its long-term strategy for security and prosperity. Thinking through these consequences today could help better inform competitive strategy for the competition in the longer term.

Panel 4: Integrating with Allies and Partners

- What lessons can be learned from past efforts to integrate allies?
- What are the particular requirements of successful private-public sector partnership?
- Is NATO's "appropriate mix" of deterrence and defense capabilities a useful model for the US?
- What needs to be done now?

There are several lessons from past efforts at allied integration. First, in the NATO context, consistent US leadership is necessary to set the alliance on the path toward coordinated action. NATO's improvements in deterrence and warfighting investments since 2014 have been linked to US efforts to integrate various actors and lines of efforts within the alliance into an overall response to the Russia threat. Second, efforts to integrate nuclear means into an overall deterrence concept are likely to be among the most difficult. Third, efforts at allied integration in support of deterrence are likely to require continuous reassessment.

The lessons of the NATO experience may be of limited applicability outside of the European context, however. It is notable that NATO itself does not use the language of integration to describe its deterrence and warfighting concepts. Instead, NATO strives for "coherence" within its capabilities mix. In Asia, alliance relationships vary in their degree of integration and at the level of strategic planning, operational planning, and wartime command structures. On the Korean peninsula, the United States and the Republic of Korea operate a combined chain of command, while in the US-Japan relationship there is no analogous structure for crisis or wartime response, for instance.

Given the heterogeneity of alliance structures, much more needs to be done in Asia to improve integration across the phases of conflict. In peacetime, integration would take place at the level of technological competition and competitive strategies for cost imposition. In gray zone competition, integration should primarily focus on managing the transition to overt crises or wars. In crises and wartime, integration would center on adaptive planning, coordinating different responsibilities, and coordinating political objectives. Across the phases of conflict, integration would mean the development of a common theory of victory.

Among the US alliances in Asia, the US-South Korea alliance had made the most progress toward integration. The Combined Force Command framework provides a vehicle for adaptive planning and crisis response, although there may be a need for better integration of military and political objectives in a future contingency on the peninsula. In contrast, if the United States were to come to Taiwan's aid in the case of future aggression from China, the US will have to create coordination mechanisms in real time. The political objectives in such a conflict would also be unclear. In the East China Sea, the US and Japan engage in some peacetime coordination, but they lack of a common military framework to allow for crisis and wartime response. Finally, in the South China Sea, as with Taiwan, there is no framework for integrating peacetime and gray zone competitive responses, as well as a lack of wartime integration.

With respect to public-private partnerships, what is required is better understanding of the market structure of key industries. In some sectors, governments have positioned themselves as champions of particular defense projects, creating incentives for industry to adapt to government needs and procurement timelines. In other sectors, government is a minor player compared to the broader market. For governments to work successfully with private sector actors, they must adapt to the faster procurement timelines and contracting approaches of industry to gain access to the benefits of private sector innovation.

Panel 5: Re-Balancing the Deterrence Toolkit

Key questions:

- What can be expected of the different modes of deterrence (punishment, denial, entanglement, resilience)?
- What re-balancing of roles is possible with a more integrated approach, if any?
- What progress was made by prior administrations in reducing the role of nuclear weapons through re-balancing? What additional progress is possible today?

Previous administrations as well as NATO in the 1990s gradually shifted emphasis toward non-nuclear capabilities in deterrence strategy. In examining opportunities to further rebalance, however, the Obama administration concluded that nuclear weapons continued to play a unique and irreplaceable role in deterring adversary nuclear escalation and, in a narrow range of scenarios, major non-nuclear attacks.

Today's military capabilities have progressed beyond the state of the art in 2010s. Yet many of the most ambitious ideas for rebalancing the toolkit remain behind the technical possibilities and involve significant risk. In addition, a significant shift in roles would require the maturation of capabilities that are still years away from maturity, including the next generation missile defense interceptor, space-based defensive capabilities, modernized general purposes forces, etc. There also seems to still be a narrow range of contingencies in which nuclear threats could deter major non-nuclear attacks, and this range has not shrunk since 2010.

In addition, the fundamental dilemma remains that US efforts would seem to have little effect on others' nuclear strategies and doctrines. While the role of US nuclear weapons has remained roughly the same since 2000, the salience of nuclear weapons in Russian rhetoric and competitive strategy has increased. China too is signaling the value that it places on nuclear weapons through its ongoing nuclear expansion. Thus, it is not clear how further efforts to rebalance the US deterrence toolkit would yield arms control or disarmament benefits, although rebalancing might be desirable for other reasons.

There is no agreement on what can be expected of the different modes of deterrence. There is, however, growing recognition that deterrence would depend on the US continuing to preserve operational advantages in space. This would not require outright superiority, but instead continued access and capability at critical junctures. In space, therefore, more emphasis must be placed on resilience.

More broadly, deterrence thinking should be better integrated with thinking on the emerging Blue theory of victory. Planning for both nuclear and non-nuclear means should account for the adversary's escalation calculus at different phases of war. One challenge, for instance, is how to make credible intra-war deterrent threats using purely non-nuclear means. Given that revisionist adversaries have already accepted some of the costs of war when they embark on aggression, it is not clear how additional non-nuclear forms of punishment could significantly alter Red's escalation calculus.

Panel 6: Lessons Learned

- Do the 'four integrations' covered in panels 1-4 span the full problem space? Is something important left out?
- Which of the many possible integration tasks should be set as priorities today? Why?
- How else should strategy and policy account for the risks of escalation?

There are at least three other forms of integration that would contribute to Blue's theory of victory. First, there is a need for more integration of diverse perspectives on Red thinking and behavior. The strategic community in the US is only partially connected to communities of interest in allied countries that engage in deep study of Russia and China, and greater integration of these views into the US discourse could be helpful. Second, there is a need for greater integration of insights from wargaming and exercises. Thirdly, what is also required is greater focus on the integration of political objectives into military planning. Presidential guidance to agencies should make integration an explicit priority. Also

With respect to priority tasks, development of integrated plans should be the forefront of Defense Department efforts. Integrated plans should include efforts to anticipate the effects of campaigns in Asia on deterrence in Europe and vice versa. Planning should also focus on deterring opportunistic aggression in either theater as a result of US engagement in other theaters. Integrated plans should also begin to devise a framework for managing the risks created by capabilities such as cyber, which can generate effects of uncertain size and duration.

Integration, however, may be a poor framework for grappling with the challenges of the new strategic environment. Integration begs larger strategic questions that cannot be answered through integration alone. How should the next National Defense Strategy prioritize geopolitical threats from peer, near-peer, and regional powers? What should be the appropriate balance between denial and punishment strategies, and between conventional and nuclear means? National policy should prioritize key problems, identify a clear path to addressing those problems, and settle overarching strategic questions first. Only then can policy implementation efforts identify the level of integration needed to implement national strategy.

Still, there is value to thinking through the complexities of integration. Integration provides a useful perspective in the context of particular domains or challenges, such as conventional-nuclear integration. This is especially the case with respect to managing escalation risks. Deterring and managing escalation would require a degree of organizational and conceptual overlap between the geographic and functional military commands that has not been attempted in the past. Thus, the value of a dedicated look at integration may be thought of as making the case for why disintegration is an impediment to efforts to grapple with the new strategic environment.

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This work was performed under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Energy by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory under Contract DE-AC52-07NA27344. LLNL-MI-827490